

OPTIMIZING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE REGIONAL PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL (DPRD) IN THE LEGAL FORMATION PROCESS

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Abstract

This study explores the crucial role of community participation through Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) in the process of regional lawmaking. The main objective is to analyze how communities actively engage in the formation of regional regulations, identify existing obstacles, and propose strategies to strengthen participatory mechanisms. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The research subjects include community members and DPRD legislators or members of regional regulation-making committees within one selected district/city, while the research object focuses on the lawmaking process involving public participation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations of community forums, and documentation of DPRD procedures and related legal instruments. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic qualitative method through stages of data reduction, data presentation, and verification (triangulation). The findings reveal that although formal mechanisms such as public consultations and hearings are established, community participation often remains symbolic. Public aspirations are recorded but rarely translated into substantive influence on DPRD decisions. The study identifies key determinants of effective participation, including transparency of information, community capacity, and the commitment of DPRD members. This research contributes to the understanding of participatory democracy in local governance and offers practical recommendations to enhance inclusivity in lawmaking: improving public access to information, empowering communities in articulating aspirations, and promoting genuinely deliberative forums. The originality of this study lies in its focus on the micro-level dynamics between communities and DPRD in Indonesia's regional legislative processes, offering insights into the real challenges of participatory governance.

Intisari

Kata kunci:

Partisipasi Masyarakat, Dprd,
Pembentukan Peraturan
Daerah, Demokrasi
Partisipatif.

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Penelitian ini mengkaji peran penting partisipasi masyarakat melalui Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD) dalam proses pembentukan peraturan daerah. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah menganalisis bentuk keterlibatan aktif masyarakat dalam proses legislasi daerah, mengidentifikasi hambatan yang dihadapi, serta merumuskan strategi penguatan partisipasi publik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Subjek penelitian meliputi anggota masyarakat dan anggota DPRD atau panitia pembentukan peraturan daerah pada satu wilayah kabupaten/kota, sedangkan objek penelitian difokuskan pada proses pembentukan peraturan daerah yang melibatkan partisipasi masyarakat. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi forum masyarakat, serta dokumentasi terhadap prosedur dan regulasi DPRD. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan verifikasi (triangulasi). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun telah tersedia mekanisme formal seperti konsultasi publik dan rapat dengar pendapat, partisipasi masyarakat masih bersifat simbolis. Aspirasi publik umumnya hanya dicatat tanpa memberikan pengaruh substansial terhadap keputusan DPRD. Faktor-faktor kunci yang menentukan efektivitas partisipasi mencakup transparansi informasi, kapasitas masyarakat, serta komitmen anggota DPRD. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman demokrasi partisipatif dalam tata kelola pemerintahan daerah serta menawarkan rekomendasi praktis untuk memperkuat inklusivitas legislasi daerah, antara lain peningkatan akses informasi publik, pelatihan masyarakat dalam merumuskan aspirasi, dan penyelenggaraan forum partisipatif yang benar-benar deliberatif. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada fokusnya terhadap dinamika mikro antara masyarakat dan DPRD dalam proses legislasi daerah di Indonesia, yang memberikan wawasan baru mengenai tantangan nyata partisipasi dalam tata kelola pemerintahan daerah.

1. Introduction

The process of forming regional regulations (Perda) is a concrete manifestation of the implementation of regional autonomy which gives authority to the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) to channel the aspirations of the people and form public policies through the legislative function. (Asapa et al., 2023; Rosianti et al., 2024). In formal mechanisms, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) plays a crucial role as a liaison between the community and the local government. However, in

practice, public participation in the regulation-making process is often merely a formality or limited to passive consultation (Tartib & Wahyuni, 2023). Various studies and observations show that public aspirations expressed in public forums rarely have a substantial influence on the content of the resulting regulations (Jati, 2012; Sembiring, 2023). For example, research in several districts in Indonesia found that public participation was still limited to expressing opinions because the final decision remained in the hands of the legislature (Iswari et al., 2020; Prastyo, 2022). A similar phenomenon also occurred in the process of drafting the Draft Criminal Code (RKUHP) at the national level, where minimal public participation gave rise to criticism of the legitimacy and representativeness of the policy (Jannah & Kartiko, 2025; Mokoagow, 2024). This condition shows that the participatory mechanism has not been accompanied by meaningful involvement, even though substantial community involvement is very important to realize regional regulations that are aspirational, accommodative and democratic.

Studies on public participation in the legislative process have been widely discussed in academic literature, especially regarding participatory democracy and regional governance (Hasthoro & Sunardi, 2016; Muhtar et al., 2025; Saputra et al., 2024). (Asdiqi, 2024; Syaiful, 2025) emphasized that public participation in the legislative process in Indonesia is very important, but still faces obstacles in the effectiveness and accessibility of participation channels. (Widiati, 2018) In his research on Efficient Public Participation in the Local Law-Making Process, he explained that the main challenge lies in the balance between legislative efficiency and openness to public aspirations. Research by (Rahmanto, 2025) also shows that regulations designed through active community involvement are more in the public interest, and highlights the importance of public forums and the use of digital technology as a means of strengthening public participation in regulation-making. However, research specifically examining how the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) functions as the primary link between the community and the regional legislative process is still relatively limited.

This study aims to analyze the active role of the community through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in the law-making process at the regional level, while also identifying the obstacles faced and strategies that can be used to strengthen substantial public participation. From a practical perspective, this study is expected to

provide recommendations for the DPRD and regional governments in improving legislative mechanisms to be more open, transparent, and responsive to community needs. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to enriching studies on participatory democracy, public transparency, and the principles of good governance in the context of regional government, particularly in the realm of regional law-making.

Although there has been much research discussing public participation in the formation of laws, most of these studies still focus on normative or conceptual aspects without explaining in depth the interactive relationship between the community and the DPRD as a representative institution at the local level. Research by (Rahman et al., 2023) shows that without strong public participation, the resulting policies tend to be biased and lose legitimacy. Meanwhile, (Harahap & Harahap, 2023) highlighting the need for digitalization as a means of expanding access to public participation in legislation. (Arifin, 2024) also emphasized that community participation is a key factor in realizing prosperity and social justice at the regional level. Based on this research gap, this study is crucial for deepening understanding of how the community can play an active role through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in the process of formulating regional laws, so that the resulting legislation truly reflects the aspirations and interests of the public in a representative and democratic manner.

2. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory case study design (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell et al., 2007). This design was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the dynamics, interactions, and meaning of community participation through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in the process of formulating regional regulations. This type of research is descriptive qualitative, namely, it seeks to systematically and factually describe the forms of community involvement, the role of the DPRD as a public representative, as well as the obstacles and opportunities that arise in legislative practices at the regional level. Qualitative research with a case study design was also chosen because it is relevant to comprehensively explore the local social and political context based on the real-life experiences of the actors involved.

The research subjects comprised two main groups directly involved in the regional law-making process. First, community groups that have expressed or are interested in expressing their aspirations in the regional regulation-making process, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, academics, and representatives of local communities. This group was chosen because they represent the public and have a direct interest in the resulting policies. Second, members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), particularly those on the Special Committee (Pansus) for the formation of regional regulations. This group plays a key role in channeling community aspirations and formulating regional regulations. The research location was determined in a district/city that has implemented the regional regulation-making process by opening up space for community participation, making it relevant for empirical study.

Data collection in this study was carried out using three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation studies (Gangrade, 1982; Miles et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) and community representatives using open-ended questions designed to explore experiences, perceptions, and mechanisms of participation in the legislative process. Direct observation was conducted by attending various public participation forums, such as public hearings (RDPs) and public deliberations. During the observations, researchers recorded patterns of interaction between the community and DPRD members, the level of community engagement in conveying aspirations, and the communication dynamics that developed during the deliberative process. Documentation techniques were used by reviewing various official documents, such as draft regional regulations, DPRD meeting minutes, minutes of public consultations, and reports on legislative activities related to community participation. These three data collection techniques were used triangulatingly to strengthen the validity, reliability, and credibility of the research results, ensuring that the findings truly represent the empirical reality on the ground.

The primary instrument in this research was the researcher herself (human instrument), supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation recording formats. The collected data were then analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis methods based on an interactive model (Miles et al., 2014) which includes three

main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification. Data reduction is carried out by selecting, grouping, and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives, particularly regarding the forms of community participation, the responses of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), and inhibiting and supporting factors in the legislative process. The data presentation is arranged in the form of a thematic narrative that in-depth describes the dynamics of community participation through the DPRD in the formation of regional laws, accompanied by direct quotations from interviews to strengthen the validity of the empirical findings. Next, verification or triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure data consistency and increase the credibility of the interpretation of the research results. Through this analytical approach, the research is expected to provide a complete, factual, and in-depth picture of the relationship patterns between the community and the DPRD in the formation of regional regulations, while also offering empirical recommendations for strengthening participatory democracy at the local level.

3. Analysis and Discussion

A. Analysis

Based on the analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies, it was found that various formal mechanisms exist that allow the public to convey their aspirations in the process of formulating regional laws through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). These mechanisms include public deliberation forums, public hearings (RDPs), and consultation sessions on draft regional regulations (Raperda). However, findings in the field indicate that the existence of these formal mechanisms has not been fully followed by substantial public involvement. Based on observations, most people attended the forums only as passive listeners without providing concrete input on the substance of the regulations. A member of the DPRD Special Committee stated that "public enthusiasm in attending the forums was quite high, but not many people truly understood the material of the regulations, so their participation was more symbolic."

Interviews with community representatives revealed that the aspirations expressed were often not directly addressed in the substance of the resulting regulations. One public forum participant stated, "We have submitted proposals regarding articles related to

environmental management, but in the draft regional regulation that was passed, these points were not clearly stated." Documentation in the form of minutes of DPRD meetings also supported this finding, where several community aspirations were simply recorded in minutes without being followed up in the formulation of articles. The interviewed DPRD members acknowledged that limited time for deliberations, technical capabilities in formulating legal norms, and political priorities of the factions often hindered the process of accommodating all public aspirations. One member stated, "We tried to absorb community input, but not all of it could be incorporated because it had to be aligned with academic texts and higher regulations."

The factors inhibiting public participation identified in this study include low information transparency, limited public access to initial drafts of regional regulations, and limited public capacity to understand legal procedures and language. Observations also indicate that public participation forums are often held after the draft regulations are nearly final, severely limiting the opportunity to influence the content of the regulations. On the other hand, several supporting factors can strengthen public participation, such as public outreach and education activities prior to the formulation of regulations, the use of digital technology as a medium for aspirations, and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD)'s commitment to following up on the results of participatory forums through open reporting. One DPRD secretariat official explained that "with the publication of drafts on the DPRD website, the public has begun to be able to provide comments, although not all have utilized this facility optimally."

Thus, the results of this study confirm that the legitimacy of regional law will increase if regulations are drafted with active, transparent, and sustainable public involvement. Substantial public participation not only strengthens trust in the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) but also reflects the implementation of good governance principles at the local level. Therefore, this study recommends the need for reform of participatory mechanisms through the digitization of aspiration forums, increasing public legal literacy, and strengthening the DPRD's commitment to ensuring that every public aspiration has real space in the legislative process.

Based on the description above, conclusions can be drawn based on the following table 1.

Table 1. Research Findings

| No | Focus of Findings | Findings | Implications |
|----|---|---|--|
| 1 | Participation Mechanisms | The Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) has provided forums such as public deliberations, Hearings (RDPs), and consultations on draft regional regulations. | Formal mechanisms exist, but they have not been effective in increasing substantial participation. |
| 2 | Community Involvement | The public attends these forums but tends to be passive and lacks understanding of the regulatory content. | Improved public legal literacy is needed. |
| 3 | Unaccommodated Aspirations | Public input is recorded in minutes but has little influence on the content of the regulations. | Transparency and follow-up on all public input are needed. |
| 4 | Technical Constraints in the Regional People's Representative Council | Limited time, technical skills, and political influence hinder the accommodating of aspirations. | Reform the legislative process to make it more inclusive and open. |
| 5 | Inhibiting Factors | Information is limited, draft regional regulations are difficult to access, and forums are held at a late stage. | Publication and consultation are needed from the early stages. |
| 6 | Supporting Factors | Socialization, public education, and the use of digital media have begun. | Expansion is needed to facilitate public participation. |
| 7 | Impact on Legitimacy | Real public participation increases trust and legitimacy in regional laws. | Encourage the implementation of good governance principles at the local level. |

B. Discussion

The research findings show that although various participatory mechanisms, such as public deliberations, public hearings, and consultations on draft regional regulations, are formally available, public involvement in the process of formulating regional laws through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), remains largely symbolic. Public involvement generally stops at the procedural level, without generating any real influence on the substance of the resulting policies. These findings demonstrate a sharp gap between rules in form and rules in practice, where public participation as stipulated in regulations is not always implemented in meaningful deliberative practices. This condition reflects a form of tokenistic participation as described by Arnstein (1969) in his Ladder of Citizen Participation, namely participation that is merely an administrative formality to demonstrate citizen involvement, but lacks transformative power in the decision-making process.

This phenomenon also demonstrates that public participation is still positioned within a top-down framework, where the legislative body controls the agenda for discussion, while the public merely serves as recipients of information. However, in the theory of participatory democracy, as proposed by Pateman (1970), ideal participation should be empowering, providing space for citizens to actively participate, express ideas, and significantly influence the direction of public policy. Openness of the DPRD mechanism without the community's capacity to understand legal material or the legislative body's ability to systematically channel aspirations will only perpetuate pseudo-participation. Therefore, public participation reform cannot simply involve increasing the number of forums; it needs to focus on improving the quality of deliberative interactions, strengthening public legal literacy, and developing the DPRD's capacity as an effective and responsive mediator of participation.

This situation is reinforced by interviews, which show that community aspirations are often only recorded in meeting minutes without significantly influencing the resulting regulatory articles. This phenomenon indicates a fundamental gap between the consultative process and substantive legislative outcomes. In the context of regional governance, this reflects the continuation of mutually reinforcing structural and cultural barriers. Structural barriers arise in the form of tight discussion time limits, high administrative burdens, and the dominance of political factions in determining the direction of regulatory substance. Furthermore, the lack of technical capacity on the part of both the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) and the community makes it difficult to translate aspirational ideas into operational legal language. This situation confirms that the regional legislative process has not fully adopted the principle of evidence-based policy and remains dependent on short-term political considerations.

Meanwhile, cultural barriers are rooted in the strong top-down paradigm in regulatory development, where the decision-making process is driven more by bureaucratic and political interests than by community needs. The hierarchical interaction pattern between the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) and the public results in public participation being viewed as a mere formality, rather than as a deliberative partner in policy formulation. However, within the framework of good governance, meaningful public participation should align with the principles of transparency, accountability,

effectiveness, and responsiveness of public institutions. Public involvement is necessary not only for procedural legitimacy but also as a mechanism for social control over the quality of regional legal products.

Therefore, this study highlights the importance of repositioning the DPRD's role from a merely formal representative institution to a deliberative mediator that serves as a bridge between the community and the regional government. The DPRD needs to internalize local knowledge, social values, and citizens' empirical experiences at every stage of legislation, so that the resulting legal products are not only formally legal but also socially legitimate. This repositioning demands a change in institutional paradigm from a rule-making institution to a collaborative governance actor, which places collaboration, openness, and shared learning as the main foundations in drafting regional regulations.

In the context of the collaborative governance theory developed (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Ariesmansyah et al., 2023), The success of public participation is determined not only by the existence of formal spaces, but also by commitment between actors, trust building, and the capacity for long-term collaboration. This research finding indicates that these three elements have not yet been fully established. Existing public forums have not yet created a shared understanding between the community and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). Therefore, future initiatives need to be directed at strengthening participatory capacity through political education, legal literacy training, and the opening of interactive digital-based communication channels. The use of information technology can be a crucial instrument for expanding access to participation, accelerating the flow of information, and increasing transparency in the regional legislative process.

In addition, the future of public participation in the formation of regional laws needs to be developed within the framework of civic engagement 4.0, namely the integration of participatory democracy and digital innovation that places technology as the main medium for public collaboration (Hidayah et al., 2025; Manikome & Mesra, 2025). In the era of digital transformation, citizen engagement is no longer limited to face-to-face forums, but can be facilitated through digital channels that enable two-way communication, open deliberation, and real-time feedback on the legislative process. By developing an e-legislation platform, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) can expand public access to draft regulations, create a sustainable space for aspirations, and enable

public participation from the planning stage to the evaluation of policy implementation. This platform has the potential to transform the dynamic of the relationship between representatives and constituents, from one that was previously hierarchical to one that is collaborative and adaptive to community needs.

This innovation aligns with the spirit of open government, which emphasizes transparency, participation, and collaboration as the three main pillars of modern governance. Through the digitization of legislation, the process of formulating regional laws can become more accountable and efficient, while simultaneously strengthening the social legitimacy of the resulting legal products. The public can access draft regulations, monitor the progress of discussions, and provide direct input without geographical or time constraints. Thus, civic engagement 4.0 brings not only technological change but also a cultural transformation toward a new form of deliberative democracy based on data and digital collaboration.

Therefore, this research not only highlights the current empirical limitations of public participation but also provides normative and practical direction for reforming the regional legislative system to be more participatory, transparent, and inclusive. The integration of digital innovation and participatory democracy is a crucial foundation for realizing regional governance that is responsive to community needs and aligned with the paradigm of good local governance. By utilizing technology as a means of public empowerment, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) can transform into a modern legislative institution that not only represents the voice of the people but also facilitates dynamic, open, and sustainable social dialogue.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the legitimacy of regional laws can only be strengthened through substantial, sustained, and empowering public participation. Participation cannot simply be understood as a procedural obligation in the legislative process, but must become a concrete mechanism to ensure that public aspirations truly influence the direction of public policy. In this context, the public needs to be positioned not as passive objects of consultation, but as deliberative partners with the capacity to engage in dialogue, assess, and contribute to policy content. This paradigm shift demands a change in the DPRD's perspective on its representational function from merely a formal

role as a channel for aspirations to a collaborative agent facilitating constructive interactions between the local government and citizens.

The Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD)'s commitment to carrying out its representative function openly, transparently, and accountably is a key factor in building public trust in regional legal products. This public trust not only serves as social capital for political legitimacy but also as a foundation for the stability and effectiveness of regional policy implementation. Therefore, improving the quality of public participation is in line with strengthening good local governance, where the principles of accountability, responsiveness, and inclusiveness are integral to the legislative process.

By developing a more collaborative, digital-based, and education-oriented participation design, the future of local democracy in Indonesia has the potential to be more adaptive to social dynamics and technological advances. This participation model not only opens up space for community involvement across all levels but also creates a more open, reflective, and sustainable regional governance ecosystem. In the long term, the synergy between a critical public and a responsive DPRD will be the primary foundation for realizing democratic, legitimate, and socially transformative regional legal governance.

This research offers novelty in the context of analyzing public participation through regional legislative institutions (DPRD), which has rarely been studied in depth from the perspective of the reciprocal relationship between political representation and participatory democracy. Unlike previous studies, which generally focus on public participation in the context of consultation or general public review, this research positions the DPRD as the hub of participation, the primary link between public aspirations and the process of regional lawmaking. This approach demonstrates that public participation is determined not only by the formal space provided, but also by the extent to which the DPRD functions as an active, transparent, and responsive deliberative facilitator of public interest.

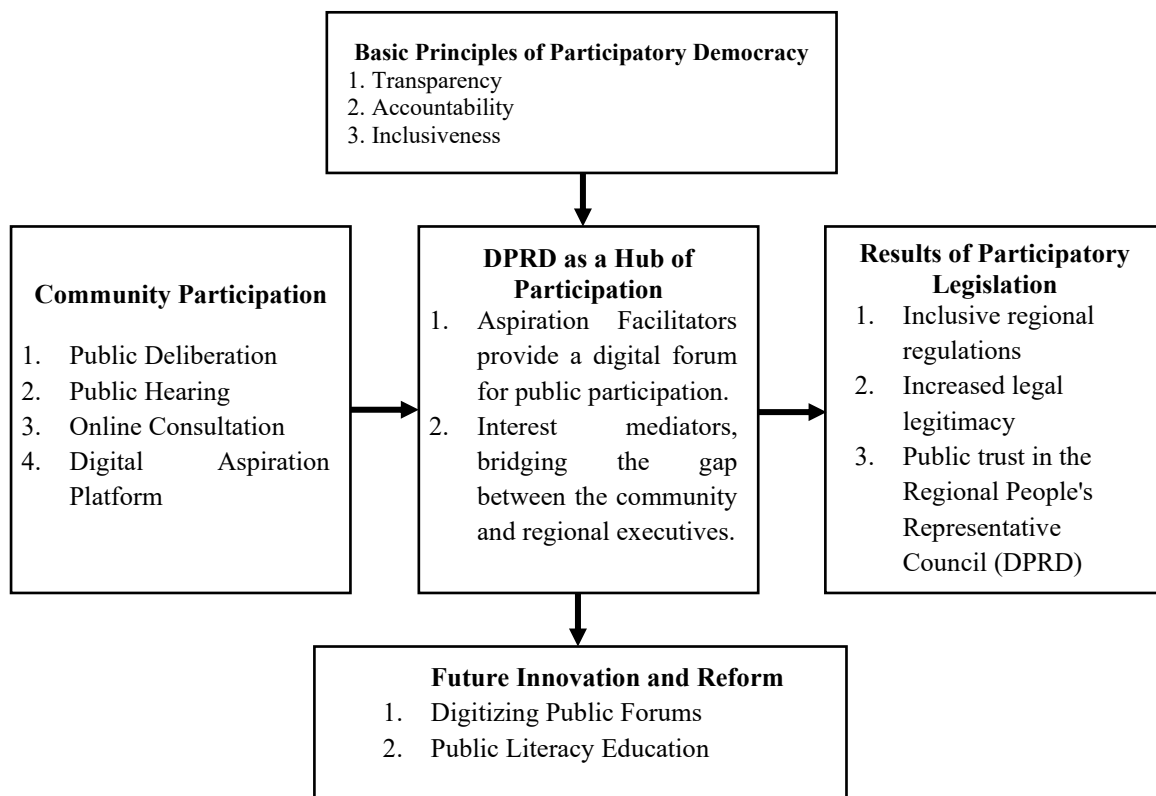
Another novelty of this research lies in the integration of empirical and conceptual analysis through a qualitative case study approach that explores participation practices directly at the regional level. By combining interview data, observation, and documentation, this research uncovers the dynamics of tokenistic participation and demonstrates the structural and cultural factors that influence its effectiveness. This

research goes beyond describing participation and offers a conceptual model for reforming participatory mechanisms that are adaptive to the digital era and the principles of good local governance.

Theoretically, this study broadens the understanding of participatory democracy by introducing the concept of civic engagement 4.0, a form of digital technology-based public engagement that enables sustainable, inclusive, and transparent participation in the regional legislative process. This model offers a new conceptual framework for strengthening the relationship between the community and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in the era of open government modernization. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies not only in its specific context, namely the active role of the community through the DPRD in the formation of regional laws, but also in its contribution to formulating a new direction for public participation oriented toward collaboration, digitalization, and substantive democratic legitimacy at the local level.

The following is a conceptual model built in this study, based on the results and discussions presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Community Participation Through the DPRD in the Formation of Regional Law



The conceptual model of public participation in the formation of regional laws through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) illustrates the synergistic relationship between the principles of participatory democracy, the role of legislative institutions, and public involvement. Public participation is based on three main principles: transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness, which serve as the foundation for an open and accountable legislative process. In practice, the public participates through various mechanisms such as public deliberations, hearings, online consultations, and digital platforms that allow for the direct delivery of ideas and criticism. The DPRD acts as a hub of participation, a central liaison between the public and the regional government, with two primary functions: facilitating public aspirations through digital participation forums and mediating interests, bridging the public with the regional executive. Implementation of this model is expected to produce more inclusive regional regulations, enhance legal legitimacy, and strengthen public trust in the DPRD. Going forward, innovation and reform of participation need to be directed at the digitalization of public forums and increasing public legal literacy to make participation more substantial. Thus, this model offers a new paradigm for local democracy based on collaboration and technology that supports the concrete realization of the principles of good local governance.

4. Conclusion

The most interesting finding of this study is that despite the provision of formal mechanisms such as public deliberations, public hearings (RDPs), and consultations on draft regional regulations (Raperda), public involvement in these processes remains largely symbolic. While the public attends, they generally do not actively provide substantive input. Moreover, their expressed aspirations are often not reflected in the substance of the resulting regulations, indicating a gap between the provided participatory mechanisms and the reality on the ground.

This research makes an important contribution to broadening the understanding of public participation in regional lawmaking. It not only identifies structural and cultural barriers in the legislative process but also offers a conceptual model for improving participatory mechanisms through the use of digital technology, increasing public legal literacy, and enhancing the Regional People's Representative Council's (DPRD)

commitment to effectively addressing public aspirations. Furthermore, this study introduces the concept of "civic engagement 4.0," which integrates digital technology-based participation with participatory democracy to create a more transparent, inclusive, and sustainable legislative system.

A major limitation of this research is its limited scope in one region, so the results may not fully reflect the situation in other regions. Furthermore, while this study reveals the dynamics of public participation, it fails to delve deeper into the psychological and social factors influencing public involvement in the legislative process. Further research is needed to explore the influence of external factors such as social media and political influence on public participation.

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